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SUBJECT: CHIAPAS GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION: PRD LEADS BY A
RAZOR-THIN MARGIN

1. (U) Summary. With over 94 percent of the votes counted as of noon August 21 in the Chiapas gubernatorial race, PRD candidate Juan Sabines Guerrero had a 0.22% lead over PRI-PVEM rival Jose Antonio Aguilar Bodegas, who is also endorsed by the PAN. However, there are still enough votes left to be counted to leave the final outcome in doubt. Following the August 20 election, each candidate declared himself the winner. Sabines remarked that he is open to reconciliation with the PAN. Aguilar complained of irregularities and said he would challenge the results in court. End Summary.

2. (U) On August 20, voters in Chiapas went to the polls to cast their ballots for their next governor. The leading candidates are the PRD's Juan Sabines Guerrero and the PRI's Jose Antonio Aguilar Bodegas, also representing the Green Party (PVEM). Ten days before the election, candidates from the PAN and New Alliance (PANAL) parties withdrew from the race and expressed support for PRI-PVEM candidate, in order to present a stronger opposition bloc to the PRD. Campaigning for Sabines in Chiapas the day before the campaign closed, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador described the unprecedented PRI-PVEM-PAN-PANAL alliance as "immoral."

PRD Candidate Slightly Ahead

3. (U) As of noon August 21, with just over 94% of the votes counted, PRD candidate Sabines enjoys a slight lead over Aguilar with 517,037 votes (48.39%), and 514,737 votes (48.17%) for Aguilar. Nevertheless with nearly six percent of the vote left to be counted, and given the narrowness of the margin, the final outcome remains in doubt. Despite the withdrawal of PAN candidate Francisco Rojas Toledo and PANAL candidate Emilio Zebadua to support Aguilar, their names were still on the ballot, with PAN's Rojas receiving 27,363 votes (2.58%) and PANAL's Zebadua receiving 3233 votes (0.3%). Districts still in dispute are San Cristobal de las Casas, Ocosingo, Pichucalco, Tonala, and Tenejapa. Voter participation in the election is estimated at 44.6%.

Both PRI and PRD Candidates Claim Victory

4. (U) The night of the election, with 30% of the vote counted, both PRD and PRI candidates claimed victory. PRD representatives stated that their candidate had won the election with a margin of between 5-7 points, according to campaign exit polls. Meanwhile, the PRI camp stated their exit polls showed their candidate ahead by about two percentage points.

¶5. (U) PRI's Aguilar told reporters that his "victory" shows the public's will to defeat the "State Election" ("Election de Estado"), referring to incumbent Governor Salazar's open support for Sabines' during the campaign. On the other hand, after claiming victory, PRD's Sabines told reporters that he is open to reconciliation with the PAN, including the possibility of "governing together."

Irregularities Reported

¶6. (U) About 1000 national and foreign observers monitored the election. So far, the Electoral Institute of Chiapas has reported 241 "inconsistencies." "We have documented many irregularities" one Mexican Electoral Observation official told El Universal, "including busing in voters, giving them handouts in different zones and other tactics to secure the vote for PRD candidate Sabines."

¶7. (U) Mexican newspapers also reported that four men were arrested for electoral law violations, including prominent labor leader Francisco de Jesus Torres who had earlier said that his teacher's union of 48,000 members would not support Sabines. According to El Universal, Torres was allegedly carrying 50,000 pesos (approximately USD 5000) to buy votes for the PRI candidate.

¶8. (U) Moreover, the Electoral Institute has requested the federal attorney general to investigate a recording of an alleged phone call between national PAN leader Manuel Espino and a PRI delegate in Chiapas discussing money to buy votes. Local PAN spokesperson has denied the authenticity of the

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tape.

Comment

¶9. (SBU) Before even the first vote was cast, AMLO announced that the only way Aguilar could possibly defeat Sabines was through fraud. Accordingly, should the PRI-PVEM-PAN alliance pull off a surprise victory, it would likely spur claims of fraud from the PRD and would probably add energy to AMLO's challenge of the outcome of the presidential election. On the other hand, if Sabines wins the election, it appears that Aguilar will challenge the results in court using some of the same arguments as AMLO has in the presidential race. This election is another example of -- and may itself contribute to -- Mexico's increasing political polarization.

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GARZA